

REMARKS

The last Office Action of October 9, 2007 has been carefully considered. Reconsideration of the instant application in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks is respectfully requested.

Claims 2, 4, 6 are pending in the application. Claims 2, 6 have been amended. No claims have been canceled or added. No amendment to the specification has been made. No fee is due.

Claims 2, 4, 6 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Pat. No. 6,217,608 to Penn et al.

Record is also made of a telephone interview between applicant's representative and the Examiner which took place on January 8, 2008. The Examiner is thanked for her help and assistance as well as for the courtesies extended to Counsel at that time. During the course of the interview, the present application was extensively discussed, and applicant's representative pointed out to the differences between the subject matter according to Penn and the subject matter according to the present invention. More specifically, applicant's representative contended that the interpretation by the Examiner with respect to "length" is untenable because the sole independent claim 6 clearly defines the longitudinal axis so that the interpretation of length as defined across the connector in circumferential direction is ill-advised. Applicant's representative suggested however to expressly relate "length" to the longitudinal axis to be clear on this point.

In addition, claim 6 has been amended to expressly set forth the curved configuration of the struts, even though this feature is implicitly contained ("curved in the same circumferential direction as the struts"), and to set forth the change in configuration of the struts between the initial curved state, as shown in Fig. 1, and the generally linear support state, as shown in Fig. 2.

The Examiner agreed that the subject matter of the present invention appears to be distinguishable over the applied prior art with the suggested

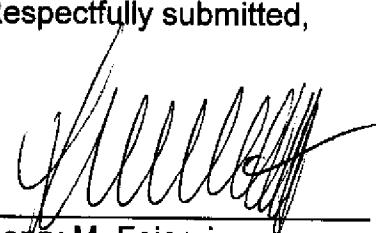
changes to claim 6. The Examiner also noted that a final determination about allowability of claim 6 depends on the outcome of an updated search.

As a result of the interview, applicant now submits amendments to claim 6, as discussed during the interview. Claim 2 has been amended to more clearly set forth the relative disposition between the wave crests and wave valleys of adjacent ring segments.

It was also agreed that the Examiner would call the undersigned if the results of the updated search merit a further discussion of this application and the Examiner feels that this might be helpful in advancing this case.

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in immediate conditions for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the outstanding rejection of the claims and to pass this application to issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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